

PLATE V.—THE WALLACE OAK.

THERE is perhaps no name in the annals of Scotland more justly celebrated than that of Wallace; one of the bravest of her heroes, and most disinterested of her patriots. Hence his steps are pointed out, wherever they can be traced, with almost religious reverence; the mountain path which he may have tracked, the headlong torrent which he may have crossed, the rugged fastness in which he may have entrenched himself, still bear his name in many parts of the country, and still invite the wanderings and charm the imagination of those who are capable of feeling the force of the sublime sentiment—

"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori."

Among the memorials to the fame of Wallace which the gratitude of posterity has delighted to point out, the trees under which he is known to have reposed or encamped, have been treated with a degree of attachment which, defeating its aim in its excess, has ultimately caused the destruction of the object it wished to commemorate. Hence the famous Oak in Torwood is no longer remaining. It stood in the middle of a swampy moss, having a causeway round it; but the last fragments of its ruins have been carried off by the pilgrims whom its fame attracted, and only the spot on which it stood now remains for them to pay their devotions to. Of Earnside Wood, where Wallace defeated the English, on the 12th of June, 1298, and which formerly stretched four miles along the shores of the Frith, not a vestige is left; and in the same manner, many other individual trees and woodland tracts, once rendered interesting by being associated with the valiant darings and hair-breadth scapes of Wallace, have bowed before the warring elements, or the un pitying axe. One Oak which bears his name still however survives, and is perhaps more interesting than any of those we may otherwise lament, on account of its standing immediately at the place of his birth, which was Ellerslie, or Elderslee, three miles to the south-west of Paisley, in Renfrewshire. It is mentioned by Semple, in his "Continuation of Crawford's History of Renfrewshire," as "the large Oak tree, which is still standing alone, in a little enclosure, a few yards south from the great road between Paisley and Kilbarchan; being on the east side of Elderslee rivulet, where there is a stone bridge with one arch, the manor of Elderslee being a few yards distant from the rivulet on the west side. They say that Sir William Wallace and three hundred of his men hid themselves upon that tree among the branches (the tree being then in full blossom,) from the English. The tree is indeed very large, and well spread in the branches, being about twelve feet in circumference," p. 260. 4to. 1782. The present dimensions of the Wallace Oak, as communicated by Mr. Macquisten, an accurate land-surveyor, are twenty-one feet in circumference at the ground; and at five feet from it, thirteen feet two inches. It is sixty-seven feet in height, and its branches extend on the east side to forty-five feet, on the west to thirty-six, on the south to thirty, and on the north to twenty-five, covering altogether an extent of nineteen English, or fifteen Scots poles, land measure. According to the testimony of aged residents in the neighbourhood, the branches of this tree, about thirty years ago, covered above a Scotch acre of ground; and one old person in particular, a lame man, who was present at its measurement, pointed out a spot on the ancient turnpike road, forty yards north from the trunk of the tree, where he said that, when young, he used to strike the branches with his stilt. This renders the account of the extent of ground it formerly covered worthy of belief; as well as the number of men which tradition reports it to have concealed, along with their brave leader, by whose name it is known. It is a peculiarity in the trees in this part of Renfrewshire, that their branches generally extend more to the south and east than to the north and west. The Wallace Oak seems destined, in sharing the fame of others of its brethren, who have been honoured by sheltering the hero Wallace, to share their fate likewise of despoliation: every year its branches pay tribute to its renown, and the western Highlanders, in particular, carry off relics from it in an abundance which threatens extinction, at no very distant period, to the parent stem, unless it be protected from further violence by its present owner, Archibald Spiers, Esq. of Elderslie, M.P. who may not be quite aware of the extent to which ravages are committed upon it through the good feeling, though mistaken judgment, of the majority of its visitants.